

A Message for Family Members

Be proud of your Soldiers

In October 2003, our Task Force Falcon journey began as we boarded planes and buses from throughout the country, all bound for Fort Stewart, Ga. For the next three months our Brigade, compiled from 19 separate states, conducted training in basic soldier skills, squad and platoon tasks, and brigade level tactical exercises.

Many of us questioned why we were undergoing this rigorous training; after all, things in Kosovo have been quiet for many years. How little we knew and how glad we were of the training received.

Every family member can be extremely proud of the reactions of their Soldiers in Kosovo during March 17 and 18 when, with no advance warning, riots erupted in multiple locations throughout the province. Our Soldiers reacted professionally and proficiently, and with no serious injuries, got the crowds under control and dispersed them.

Many have said these riots set Kosovo back five years, but I disagree. Sometimes, you have to take a step back in order to go forward. The majority of Kosovars I have met since arriving are friendly people who do not want the fighting to continue. They want to go to their fields and get them ready for spring planting. They want to continue fixing their homes damaged in earlier conflicts. They want their children to be able to play without fear of injury. They want the same thing we want – the freedom to make their own decisions.

On March 18 our Soldiers helped protect Kosovar interests so they can hopefully take that step forward. Everyone in the task force was involved and accomplished what they set out to do – restore a safe and secure environment for all. This was a team effort that required every single Soldier in the Task Force, regardless of Military Occupational Specialty, to perform flawlessly. While situational awareness remains high, the Soldiers are back patrolling the streets and talking to the people who call Kosovo



**Lt. Col. Barbara Ekdahl,
Logistics Section OIC**

home. A semblance of normalcy is returning now and Kosovars are attempting to get back to their normal routines, as are the Soldiers of Multi-national Brigade (East).

Hopefully the rest of our time here will be as calm as it has been for previous rotations, but should violence erupt as it did on March 17, families and loved-ones should know their Soldiers have already demonstrated their courage, competence, and commitment to keeping the people of Kosovo safe, and the Soldiers will undoubtedly demonstrate those qualities again.

Civil Affairs assesses riot damage

By Spc. Sean McCollum

In the aftermath of the disturbances in Kosovo, the mission of the 448th Civil Affairs Battalion has become all the more important. The focus of the mission, said Lt. Col. John Handy of the 448th Civil Affairs Battalion, has shifted, however, from resettling Internally Displaced Persons from outside of the area to ensuring the safety and security of minority populations in the area. A recent mission took Handy's investigative group to two towns to assess the damage done.

The first stop for Handy was the village of Kosovska Kamenica/ Kamenice, home to a forward operating base for MNB(E) and a relatively quiet area.

"The purpose of going to Kamenica is that we heard conflicting reports," Handy said of his desire to check out the situation there. "We heard a report that there had been considerable damage, and then I heard internally that things were amazingly calm and the damage was quite limited." During a walking tour, Handy saw that the internal reports were more accurate.

The group walked by the few broken storefront windows and ended up at a street corner blocked off by concrete barricades and camouflage netting. For a village of about 15,000 people, one-third of which was ethnic Serb, Handy was surprised how little damage was done.

"There's a Serb Orthodox church near the middle of town. It was completely unmolested. No graffiti, no damage, no broken windows, no checkpoints, no cops, no

fence. It was just there," said Handy. "It was very reassuring to see what has been a target in other communities looks like any corner church back in the States."

After assessing the situation in Kamenice/ Kosovska Kamenica, the group moved to the town of Silovo/ Shillove, which became a "safe haven" for local Serbs during the recent disturbances. At one point up to 116 people used the facilities in the converted first floor schoolhouse. Twenty-six people, mostly elderly, populated the lower floor of the elementary school two days after the disturbance, sleeping on mattresses next to the chalkboards, desks, and chairs of the classrooms.

Outside children played soccer. Another Civil Affairs Team working there and led by Maj. Don Rush, escorted local Serbs back to their homes to retrieve personal items they needed during their stay at the school while Handy checked on the well-being of the people staying in the school. There were many issues to cover.

"For one, there was how to minimize the impact on the IDPs themselves as far as personal hygiene, sleeping arrangements, minimal levels of care," said Handy. "Do they have heat? Is the building satisfactory for spending the night? That was all answered in the affirmative."



1st Sgt. Gregory Thomsen, the First Sergeant for the 448th Civil Affairs Battalion, inspects a shelter March 19 in the town of Silovo/ Shillove.

In addition to evaluating the situation, Handy also brought news to the Kosovars who did not know what was going on in their village. One occupant of the school, a teacher by trade, said that he owned two houses that were being guarded by MNB(E), for which he was thankful. He wondered when he would be able to return.

"The situation has calmed down, but give it a couple of days," said Handy.

The next challenge for Handy, still unresolved, was to find another site for the IDPs. This was essential, he said, so as not to create another class of IDPs: the schoolchildren.

HHC Soldiers help local school

Message from Maj. Todd Balsimo, HHC Commander

Ramadan Rexhpi School is located approximately one mile from Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo, in the village of Sojevo.

The principle (School Master) is Mr. Ekrem Hasan Hassani. Classes are Kindergarten through 9th Grade per teaching shift.

The school day is divided in two. Half of the K-9 children attend school during the morning hours and the other half during the afternoon hours. There are 305 students who attend the school daily. There are 20 teachers, 14 male and 6 female. The school year is 12 September through 25 June.

Christmas Break is 22 December through 8 January. Other school breaks include 31 October and 25 April thru 30 April. Student ethnicity is Kosovar, ethnic Albanian. Primary language is Albanian. The school was used as a headquarters building during the war and so it was in rough shape when the teachers and students returned.

KFOR HHC soldiers have been visiting the school for many rotations and helping the school with various projects. Today, KFOR 5B HHC Soldiers visit the school and continue to help with various projects to improve the school grounds. During each visit, Mr. Hassani welcomes us to the school and we proceed to the teacher's lounge. There, we gather around the table to drink tea with him and the teachers. The water for the tea is heated on a wood burning stove, which provides



Left to right: Maj. Balsimo, Tueta, Sgt. Hoffman, CW2 Roy, Cpt. David, Mr. Hassani.

heat for the room. All classrooms are heated this way. Note the stove pipe in the photo above.

During our last visit, we interacted with the 9th grade students. The 9th grade students have had a few years of English language, so it was a great opportunity for them to practice speaking English with us. Our interpreter, Tueta, also goes with us during our visits because Albanian is the primary language.

During our interaction, we asked the students various questions and then they asked us questions. I asked all the students the same question, "What do you want to be when you are an adult?" Each student responded proudly. Here are just a few of their responses: Lawyer, Journalist, Singer, Soccer Player, Fashion Designer, Judge, Soldier, and Computer Programmer.

Some questions the students asked us, "What are the differences between Kosovo people and American people?", "How old are you?"

"Do you have a wife/husband, children?" "What kind of music do you like?"

After conversation with the 9th grade students, we proceeded to the Kindergarten room to visit the children. The younger children do not know English, so the interpreter was there to assist us while we spoke to the children. We had the pleasure of handing out donated clothing to the young children. The donations are sent by KFOR Soldier's families back in the US. Donations include clothing, books, pencils, paper, and chalk. We distributed children's clothes donated by Major Al Koeckeritz's wife, Darcy, and their children Noah, Hattie, and Emma. The children were very thankful.

We visit the school Tuesday of each week. We look forward to our next visit to the school where we will discuss some of the spring school projects we would like to help with.

HHC guard duty in Kamenica

By Spc. Amy Burlingame

The duty roster said it was my turn to go out to the forward operating base in Kamenica, so what was I going to say, but “OK”. I was a little worried about going. I had thoughts like, “Am I going to be safe, and how many other soldiers are going to be there?” running through my head, but the wonderful First Sergeant we have put my mind at ease.

The week before we had to go out he took me on a recon of the area, and to check on the Soldiers there on guard duty that week. It was the first time I stepped outside the front gate, “out of the wire” as many here put it. I was blown away at the sites I saw that day. The culture, the area, and how different they live from us, was just the tip of the iceberg.

We headed out Sunday morning at 0800; it took us about two hours to get there with narrow roads and weather that was not so nice that day. We made it in one piece.

By the time we got there the guards we were relieving were packed and ready to go, so we started right in on guarding the gate.

I worked the first shift. It was uneventful, so I was at ease just a little bit more by that time.

The next couple of days I kept busy, but by Wednesday I wanted to get out and see more. I met up with a Sergeant from the Infantry

and he asked if I wanted to go out and do a patrol with them the next night, and it didn’t take me long to answer, yes, I wanted to go. We headed out at 1700; we stopped at a school where some children were out in the courtyard playing soccer, so we played a game or two with them, then moved down the road. We walked around town for about two hours, talking with the locals and making sure everything was going the way it should. Then the squad I was with wanted to stop and get some coffee. At this point I turned from Soldier to tourist in about two seconds flat!

The coffee shop we stopped in was nothing like Starbuck’s. They had American music playing in the background, and American flags on the tables. I am sure all the locals thought I was crazy, taking tons of pictures and asking all kinds of

questions. The waiters didn’t speak any English, but we managed to order the coffee we wanted.

The next couple of days went by very fast! I managed to go out on three more patrols. On one of the patrols we stopped at the school where we played soccer. We went in this time and asked to talk to the principal who showed us around, and the children were excited to see American KFOR soldiers. One thing I noticed were the little girls. They saw me and went and got their girlfriends and all they could do was point at me. I asked the interpreter what they were saying; he said they hadn’t ever seen a female soldier.

After we left the school and entered the courtyard again, two little girls that looked like sisters came up to me and took my hand, then wrapped their arms around my legs

(see GUARD next page)



From Right to Left: Spc. Burlingame, Radio DJ Ardbber, 2-136th squad.

Soldier's actions rewarded

Submitted by
Capt. Jill M. David,
Deputy G6

Recently, Pfc. Jared Gertzen (right) was awarded an Army Achievement Medal for his contributions to KFOR 5B, including apprehending a shoplifter at the PX in Fort Stewart, Ga. Pfc. Gertzen tackled him as he was fleeing the store and detained him until MPs arrived. He has made significant contributions to the Task Force and the G6 section. Way to go Jared!



(GUARD from previous page)



Betsy

and gave me a big hug. I am not one that is left speechless often, but at that moment I was.

We continued on with our patrol and it did not take long before another local approached us. He wanted to know if we would be on his radio show. He wanted a male and a female voice. I was a little taken back. I didn't want to go on the radio and say something that I shouldn't, but after talking to him for a while all he wanted was for us to do a jingle or two. We agreed to that and the next day we returned to the radio station to become Kosovo radio stars. The DJ was fun and we all laughed a lot and had a great time saying how great the radio station was. The next day the DJ met us at

a coffee shop to give us a couple of the bits we did. He sat with us for a while telling us all about the war and how he felt about it. He told us about the sites he saw sweep through his town and the changes that took place after KFOR came to help his people.

I also made a new friend, and her name became Betsy. She was one of the stray dogs that we fed at the guard shack. She showed up everyday rain or shine, asking for food. She came with us on one of the patrols and was a nice friend to have.

I learned many things about the culture and the people of Kosovo and was glad to have guard duty that week in Kamenica.



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www.mnbe.hqusaar.army.mil

for more pictures, stories, and information about the Soldiers.

Find helpful answers to your questions

Submitted by LeAnn Fobbs, Michigan

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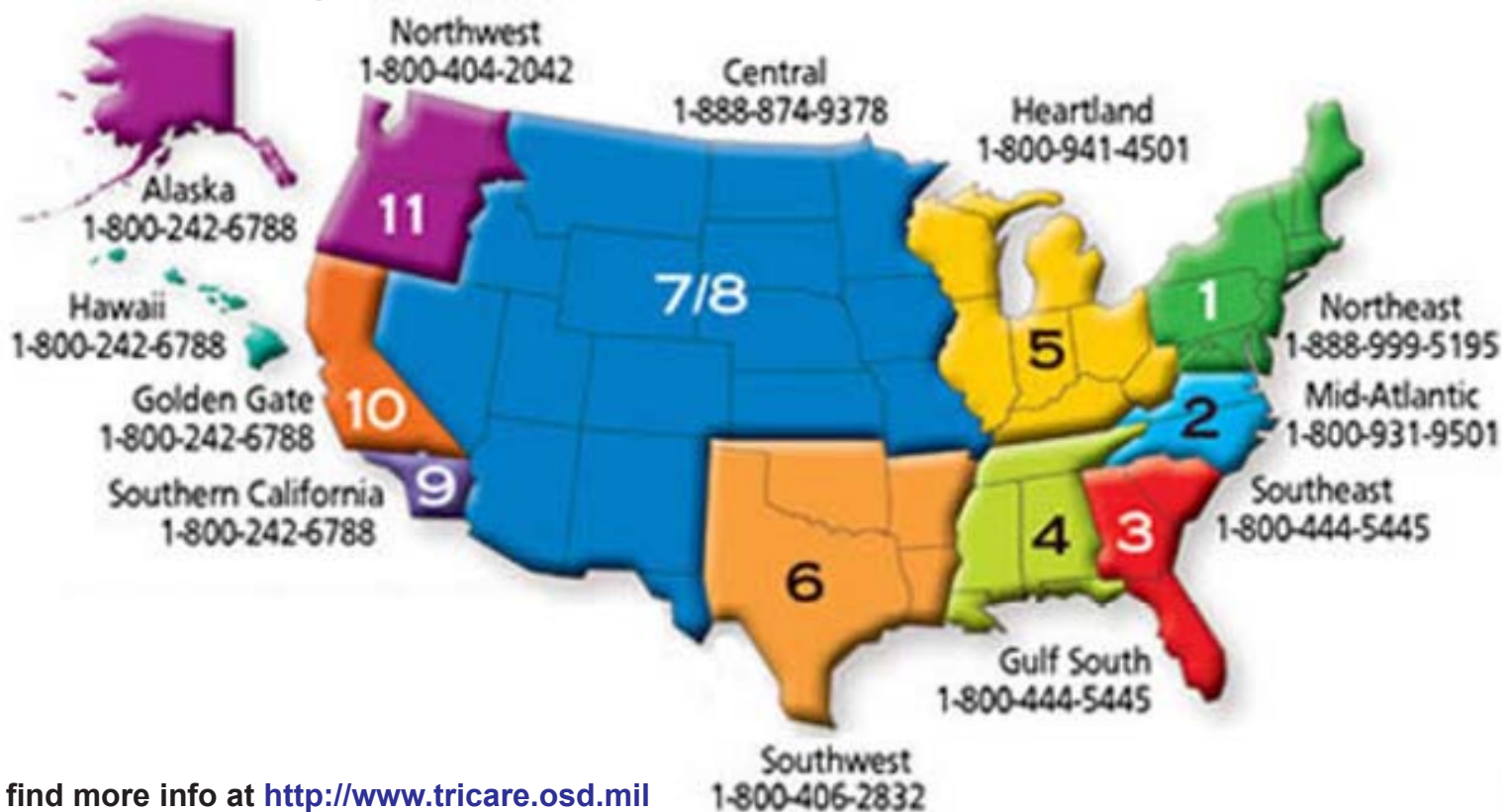
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